

Message Text

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51

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8255

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, XF, VT

SUBJECT: POPE RECEIVES PLO REPRESENTATIVE

1. POPE PAUL ACCORDED PRIVATE AUDIENCE NOV. 16 TO PLO OFFICIAL GABRIEL DEEB, AN EVENT WHICH SEVERAL VATICAN OBSERVERS HAVE DESCRIBED AS IMPORTANT STEP IN LEGITIMATING PROCESS OF PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION. DEEB, WHO RECEIVED IN COMPANY WITH HIS WIFE, HAD BEEN IN ROME TO ATTEND WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE. A CHRISTIAN FROM JERUSALEM, HE IS RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE MET POPE PAUL BEFORE ALTHOUGH DEFINITELY NOT IN PLO CAPACITY. DEEB REQUESTED AUDIENCE WHICH INITIALLY SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, NOV. 13, BUT VATICAN AUDIENCE OFFICE REPORTEDLY UNABLE TO LOCATE HIM THAT DAY AND RESCHEDULED AUDIENCE FOR SATURDAY. VATICAN SEMI-OFFICIAL DAILY "OSSERVATORE ROMANO" SIMPLY PRINTED NAMES OF MR. AND MRS. DEEB IN LIST OF AUDIENCES WITHOUT REFERENCE TO PLO.

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2. VATICAN PRESS SPOKESMAN ALESSANDRINI ANNOUNCED TO JOURNALISTS

THAT MEETING HAD NO OFFICIAL CHARACTER, WAS DEVOID OF POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND GRANTED BECAUSE DEEB'S WIFE WAS A CATHOLIC.

3. COMMENT: THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT LONG ANTICIPATED PAPAL AUDIENCE FOR PLO MEMBER WAS INTENDED AS A VATICAN GESTURE TO PALESTINIANS. BY RECEIVING DEEB AND HIS WIFE, WHO BOTH CHRISTIANS AND WHO OSTENSIBLY IN TOWN FOR OTHER PURPOSE, VATICAN WAS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS GESTURE IN MOST PAINLESS MANNER. ALTHOUGH ALESSANDRINI'S MALADROIT AND TRANSPARENT JUSTIFICATION HAS, IN THE EYES OF SOME LOCAL ARAB DIPLOMATS, SOMEWHAT DIMINISHED SIGNIFICANCE, FACT THAT POPE PAUL KNOWN TO HAVE REFRAINED FROM GIVING INDIVIDUAL AUDIENCES TO WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS HAS MADE EXCEPTION FOR DEEB EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT EVENT. VOLPE

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